

# VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

AT THE

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BY

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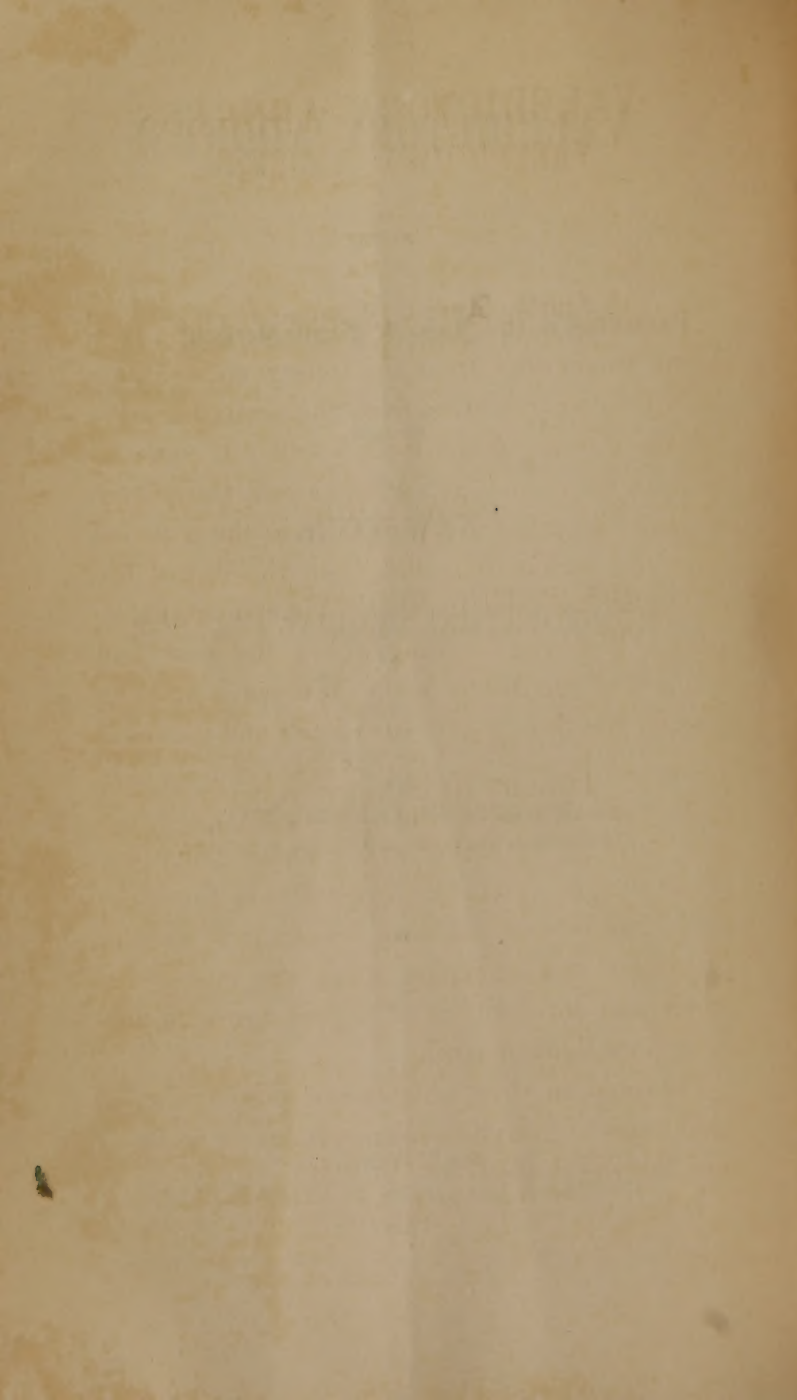
PROFESSOR OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE.

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PROGRESS is the watchword of the age. It is borne to our ears from the toiling masses, from the changing dynasties, from the venerable institutions of learning of the old world. It comes to us from the church and school-house, those landmarks of a perfect civilization, from the crowded mart and secluded hamlet, from the lips of the statesman and the herald of benevolent enterprise. We hear it rising above the roar and carnage of the battle-field. We see it moving grandly on, though at times clouds and darkness are about it, and the wail of stricken ones is in its path, and we know that this mighty spirit will ever move on to higher and grander triumphs, penetrating everywhere, like a sunbeam, the darkened chambers of the soul, breaking down the prejudices and sweeping away the mists, the errors and superstitions of a past age with the clear, pure light of truth.

The question, then, which we propose to discuss briefly this evening, is a pertinent one on an occasion like the present.

*What position ought the Medical Profession to occupy in the ranks of this mighty onward move-*

ment? And I reply in the first place: *The world demands a thoroughly educated and skilfully trained medical profession.*

The days of pretence have passed away. Broad parchments and high-sounding titles are no longer the passports to success. He who would achieve and maintain a position in the world must do it by brains rightly applied, must learn sooner or later the lesson, that there is no royal highway to success, that he who would leave his mark on the age must not only possess knowledge, but know how to apply it to the best advantage. Not every man may be a genius, for the genius appears upon the stage not once in an age, appears for some great purpose, and startles the world with his far-reaching knowledge, or the greatness and grandeur of his acts. We can almost number them on our fingers' ends. But every man of ordinary intelligence may, by proper training, so develop his mental resources that in the great contest of life he shall perform his duty nobly and well, and do something for the regeneration of the world. No man has any right in this world, to breathe its air, to live in its sunlight, and eat of the fruits of the earth, unless he can do something to make that world better, something to help on the grand work of a world's development and regeneration.

There is no profession in the world which has it in its power to accomplish so much for human-



ity, to do so much for the development of man and the regeneration of the world, as the medical profession—none which so requires the development of every faculty of the mind, none which brings into play so minute and extensive information in every department of knowledge. The physician has to deal not with crude, inert matter, but with a living organism, with a system sensitive to every breath of air, to every ray of sunlight, to the thousand influences ever at work to derange its delicate tissues and jar with a discordant note its living harmony. He walks abroad upon the earth, and each plant speaks to him not only of beauty but of use. He walks over the rich soil, and knows that it contains within its bosom seeds of disease which if liberated would bring agony and death to thousands. He treads the granite rock, and knows that its each minute particle contains a life, which now only sleeps, but which, acted on by proper influences, may be quickened into a living power. As the rain-drops patter on his window, he knows that each one contains, locked up in its crystal form, an electric power which, if liberated, might strike with death the strongest man. Gold, and silver, and iron have an interest to him separate from their commercial value, for he knows they have the power of healing disease. How shall he grasp and wield these potent weapons? How, in his contest with disease, shall he marshal his forces from the

earth, the sea, and the air, for the relief of suffering humanity? How point out the cause and course of the pestilence, and guard against its approach?

It is a mistake that the triumphs of medical science are alone seen in the sick room. The skill of the surgeon is shown less in the heaps of dismembered limbs to which he can point than in the forms which he has saved from the mutilating touch of his knife. And the skill of the physician is shown less in grappling with disease after it has planted its fangs in the human system than by his intimate acquaintance with nature's laws pointing out the cause of disease, and either meeting the pestilence and vanquishing it before it crosses the threshold, or warned of its approach by unerring laws, the assault when it comes shall not find him unprepared. How our hearts thrilled with agony but the other day as we heard of a detachment of our brave troops marching into an ambush, and their first warning of danger the fearful crash of artillery and their comrades falling around them. Where were the scouts to warn the advancing column that the enemy lay in ambush there? And the time is not far distant when the physician will be hurled from his post if he allows the pestilence to burst upon a community without sending forth the note of alarm.

Early in this century, out from the jungles and

from along the banks of the rivers of India marched a disease which everywhere strewed its pathway with dead. It had appeared before, bursting suddenly upon a community, blasting it with its breath, and then dying away. But now, in the year 1817, it seemed to have fully marshalled its forces and marched on, slowly, haltingly at times, but irresistibly as doom; on through the crowded cities, leaving them a waste; on over the rich plains, across the sandy desert, against the wind and the storm, on over the mountain ranges whose lofty tops presented no barrier to its progress. What could check its march, what break its mighty power! While it lingered in the East a physician wrote to an old friend in a quiet German town, whose reputation as a man of science was world-wide, of whom Berzelius, the great Swede, has said he was second to no living chemist, a careful description of the disease. The student set himself to work and in time wrote back to his old friend, "The disease will march on through Persia, Russia, Germany, England, across the Atlantic, until it has girded the earth; and the remedy for the *Asiatic cholera* is—*camphor*," a remedy which the experience of physicians in every country, since that time, has demonstrated as the most powerful agent in controlling that disease we possess. The name of that man was *Samuel Hahnemann*, a name which for this, if for nothing else, should



ever be honored by every true lover of science. Here was true science, waiting not for the appearance of the pestilence, but snuffing it from afar as the war-horse snuffs the battle, mapping out its progress and indicating the remedy.

Again, in the century preceding the discovery of vaccination by Jenner, over a hundred and sixty thousand human beings fell victims to the Small-Pox in England alone: and was not he who discovered a preventive to this loathsome malady more truly the man of science than the physician, however skilled he might be, who merely administered at the sick bed?

Diseases spread not alone by contagion, not alone by the poison thrown out by the infected person, but more generally appear and spread as epidemics. The laws which govern some of these epidemics are understood, and the means for their prevention or control are known; and the time will surely come when the key-note of all will be struck, and the tangled skein unravelled—when the physician, faithful at his post, watching the laws of nature, learning the philosophy of life, reproduction, and decay, the action of light and heat, the currents in the ocean and the air, the chemical changes ever going on, shall say there lies the cause, and here the remedy. Thus one disease after another will be banished, one noxious cause after another removed, and the



human race march grandly upward in its higher and purer life.

Said I not well, then, that the medical profession are to be the great agents in the regeneration of the world? Standing just at the threshold of infancy, catching the first wailing cry of dawning life and the last sigh as death seizes its prey, watching over each stage of life, showing how the violation of moral laws brings pain and death, and that to be well they must be pure and true, who in this way exerts so powerful an influence as the true physician? As a moralist, as a man of science, if he fulfils his duty, he must stand boldly out in the front rank.

2. We pass now to the second division of our subject. *The spirit of the age demands a thoroughly honest and unprejudiced medical profession.*

If the medical profession is to perform so important a part in the regeneration of the world no private pique, no sectional jealousies should hold them back in their grand mission or mar the harmony of their action. What though one may claim to be of Paul and another Apollos, do they not all own the leadership of the same great master, striving for the same great ends? In old feudal times, in the days of ignorance and prejudice, when the world had scarcely begun to feel the quickening influence of a life of progress, the leaders of clans found it necessary to dig

deep the moat and build high and strong the feudal tower to guard themselves against the adversary ; and the church breathing hell-fire and damnation against all who dared depart from its teachings, sought to punish or win the erring back with the cord, the axe, or the faggot. But beneath the softening teachings of the great master, beneath the potent touch of progress, the old feudal walls are crumbling away, the division lines once so impassable are fading, and man everywhere is standing on higher ground, in a purer atmosphere, admitting a broader faith and a stronger, more universal brotherhood.

Has the past taught us nothing ? Now that the trumpet is everywhere sounding the note onward, now that a new life is breathing through the world, must we cling to the prejudices and superstitions of the past, and wrapping ourselves round in the mantle of our own dignity, say go thy way for I am holier than thou ? True, we profess to be fighting for the same great end, we own the same great leader, but we differ as to the means by which those ends are to be accomplished, and therefore I will have no fellowship with you. Shame, eternal shame on such a spirit. It is neither the spirit of Christianity nor of true science, and he who persists in maintaining it in this advancing age is himself the veriest charlatan that walks the earth. He must change, or be crushed beneath the weight of the world's scorn

and indignation. True science ennobles the mind, lifts man above his prejudices into a brighter sunlight and a purer atmosphere. I have seen physicians intruding their own petty spites and narrow prejudices into the sick room, more fearful of compromising their own dignity, more fearful of breaking through the trammels of caste which prejudice and ignorance had imposed upon them than zealous for the human life whose sands were fast ebbing away. What right have they to intrude their own importance, their own contemptible passions and prejudices, into the presence of disease and death? No, there the man should be lost in the physician. But one thought should actuate his mind, the relief of that suffering human being, and to that, if necessary, he should address every energy of his nature.

The true physician, the man who honors his profession as a man of science, is ready to receive instruction from every source, from the lowly and unknown as well as from those whose reputations are world-wide. In his profession he has no prejudices, he asks only for truth, and drinks it in from whatever source it may come. He has no fear that his dignity will be compromised by contact with those who may honestly differ from him. He feels that the physician, if he is true to himself, true to his duties, should be familiar with the whole field of medical science, that he may bring to bear at the right time and in the

right way the appropriate remedy to produce relief, if relief is in the range of human skill.

I see before me a room where the light falls softly through curtained windows, where every footstep is hushed and every voice is low and tremulous, and every face wears a look of anxiety or is stamped with the deep lines of agony. On its little bed I see the pale face of a sweet child, the only one, wrestling with death: its curling hair is wet with the damp dews which stand in drops upon his brow. The eyes turn imploringly from one to another as if pleading for help in its great agony. Oh! who can tell the hopes that are centred in that little form? Oh! who can tell the love that is garnered there? Kind friends are standing round, but they can bring no help to those breaking hearts. The man of God is there, ever faithful at his post, but with that writhing form before them, they cannot listen to his message of reconciliation now. But hush! on the stairs are heard the well known footsteps, and eager eyes and imploring looks greet the physician as he enters. How they watch his every look, as if they could read there the doom of their child. What care they for theories now? What for the wrangling of the schools? They cry for help—help for that little life which is rapidly gliding to the spirit world: and *woe, woe, woe* be to him, if now in this hour of peril, when breaking hearts are around him, and



life is ebbing away, through wilful ignorance he falters or fails in his high trust. How dare he tamper with human life? How dare he place his unskilled hand, stiffened with prejudice, on the helm, while before him roar the breakers and around him the black waters are boiling. Woe be to him if, through wilful ignorance, that life is sacrificed! Woe be to him in that fearful day when God shall make requisition at his hands!

I have said that the world demands a thoroughly educated and skilfully trained medical profession, and that the true physician will bring to the faithful discharge of his duties an honest and unprejudiced mind. He recognises but one test of fellowship, honesty of purpose and scientific attainment; that is the platform upon which he stands, and knows it will stand firm through all coming time. He recognises in every honest and earnest seeker after truth a friend and brother, and says, though in many things we may differ, still we will work hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder for the same great cause, the relief of suffering humanity and the redemption of the world.

*Gentlemen of the Graduating Class:* As we stand together upon the threshold of your professional career, upon which you enter with all the enthusiasm of youth, there is mingled with the feelings of hope and pride which animate us one also of sadness. We who have toiled on year

after year, we whose heads are growing grey in the service, know full well the toilsome, thorny path you will have to tread; the days and nights of anxiety and toil, the aching head, the weary body, the load of responsibility which at times seems to crush to the earth. Your profession, gentlemen, is a toilsome one, requiring untiring devotion and incessant labor, often meeting both disappointments and rebuffs hard to bear. Still toil on, never swerving from the path of honor, and ever bear in mind that the reputation of the physician should be stainless. You perceive in your patients not so many dollars and cents, not so much to be made, but a disease to be cured.

Never take a patient, poor or rich, unless you are willing to devote to that case, if need be, all the energies of your nature. I have said the profession you have chosen is a toilsome and weary one—many fall by the way, many sink beneath the heavy burden, struck down by the breath of the pestilence or of disease contracted in the discharge of their duties: yet these forgotten heroes, unknown and unlamented but by a few, when God makes up his jewels, will pale with their flashing brightness the glitter of the world's idols, and wear upon their head a brighter chaplet than that which is twined around the conqueror's brows. They placed their lives willingly, cheerfully, on the altar of duty, and faltered not though they knew that the path led to the grave. Re-

member there must be no faltering in the path of duty—no shrinking, though death stands in the way. But there is a reward even here more precious than silver or gold: the consciousness of duty performed, the assurance that you have sweetened the bitterness of many a cup, lightened the burden of many an aching heart, and soothed many a weary pillow with your words of comfort and your skill. There is a sweetness, too, in the reciprocal affection existing between the physician and the patient over whom he has watched long and faithfully.

Many of you were present but the other day as the body of one of our oldest and most esteemed physicians lay in its coffin before the altar in the church in which he had worshipped; you saw the old man himself trembling on the brink of the grave, and the grey-haired matron bending over the form of him who had been their counselor and friend, while the tear-drops fell fast on the clay-cold face; and the young man and blooming maiden were there choking back their sobs as they looked for the last time upon the face of their loved old friend. He died (as the hero dies) at his post of duty, with his armor on: his hand clasped in the hand, and his head leaning on the breast of her, the wife and beloved of his youth and maturer years, he passed direct from the scene of his earthly labors to his immortal reward.



And why should the true physician, who has performed his duty, fear death? He has stood too often by the dark river to fear now that his time has come. The grave seems but an opening through which he catches sight of the glories of an immortal world. Death to him is no King of Terrors, draped about with gloom, but a white winged angel, clasping its arms tenderly about him, and lifting him up to his eternal reward.

Gentlemen, I will not say farewell, for in this world partings and farewells are so brief as scarcely to deserve the name. To-day we clasp each other by the hands as brothers and compeers: to-day we bid you go forth into your broad field of duty, holding high the standard of your profession. Remember it is written all over with heroic names and heroic deeds. Oh, see to it! that no stain is ever thrown upon that standard by your hands.

And now, gentlemen, go forth into the world to labor for humanity—go forth with the hopes, the pride, the love of your old teachers, and may the God of Heaven ever watch over you and bless you.